

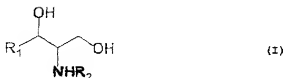
AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claims 1-6 (canceled).

7. (currently amended): A method of preparing a clear aqueous composition, which is not irritating to the skin, consisting essentially of 1.0 to 5.0% by weight of a ceramide represented by formula (I):



wherein R₁ represents a hydrocarbon group having 9 to 17 carbon atoms; and R₂ represents an acyl group having 2 to 30 carbon atoms which can contain a hydroxyl group,

comprising adding water to a lipid composition consisting essentially of (A) said ceramide, (B) a long-chain fatty acid having 12 to 24 carbon atoms, and (C) a nonionic surface active agent, and (E) optionally a sterol compound, and which components (A), (B), (C) and optionally (E) are being uniformly mixed while heating at 80 to 120°C and (F) polyhydric alcohol which has been heated to 80 to 100°C is added to the lipid composition and mixed

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while heating, and water which has been heated to 80 to 100°C is added thereto, and the resulting mixture is then allowed to cool to room temperature.

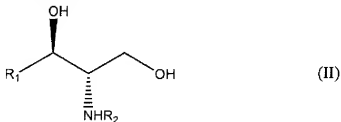
Claims 8-11 (canceled).

12. (previously presented): The method of claim 15, wherein the long-chain fatty acid is at least one of isostearic acid and oleic acid.

13. (previously presented): The method of claim 15, wherein the non-ionic surface active agent is a polyoxyethylene hydrogenated castor oil.

14. (previously presented): The method of claim 15, wherein there is further added to the water and the lipid composition cholesterol.

15. (previously presented): The method of claim 7, wherein said ceramide represented by formula (I) is an optically active ceramide of natural type represented by formula (II):



wherein R₁ and R₂ are as defined in claim 7.

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16. (previously presented): The method of claim 15, wherein the long-chain fatty acid is isostearic acid and oleic acid in combination.

17. (previously presented): The method of claim 16, wherein the non-ionic surface active agent is a polyoxyethylene hydrogenated castor oil and wherein there is further added to the water and the lipid composition cholesterol.

18. (previously presented): The method of claim 15, wherein the compound represented by formula (II) is selected from the group consisting of:

- (2S, 3R)-2-tetradecanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-hexadecanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-octadecanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-nonadecanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-eicosanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S,3R)-2-oleoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-linoleoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-(2-hydroxyhexadecanoyl) aminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S,3R)-2-(3-hydroxyhexadecanoyl) aminoctadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-tetradecanoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-hexadecanoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol,
- (2S, 3R)-2-octadecanoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol,

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(2S, 3R)-2-nonadecanoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol,
(2S, 3R)-2-eicosanoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol,
(2S, 3R)-2-oleoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol,
(2S, 3R)-2-linoleoylaminohexadecane-1,3-diol, and
(2S, 3R)-2-(2-hydroxyhexadecanoyl)aminohexadecane-1,3-diol.

19. (previously presented): The method according to claim 15, wherein the compound of formula (II) is (2S, 3R)-2-octadecanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol.

20. (previously presented): The method according to claim 17, wherein the compound of formula (II) is (2S, 3R)-2-octadecanoylaminoctadecane-1,3-diol.